

PLUMAS COUNTY

CDF Area Forester – Alan Klem
Plumas County Fire Safe Council



The mission of the Plumas County Fire Safe Council is to reduce the loss of natural and manmade resources caused by wildfire through pre-fire activities.

Demographics

Plumas County's population as of the 2000 census was 20,824, an increase of over 1000 residents or 5.6% in the last decade. The county's population is expected to increase to 28,000 by 2020. Five community areas account for almost fifty percent of the County's population. These communities include Portola/Sierra Valley with 4000, Chester/Lake Almanor and Quincy/Meadow Valley/Feather River Canyon with 2000 each, Greenville/Indian Valley with 1500, and Graeagle/Mohawk Valley with 1200. Portola is the only incorporated city in the county. Plumas County's population is older on average than that of the state as a whole. People 65 years of age and older constitute 22% of the county's population; more than double the percentage in the state as a whole (10.6%).

Plumas County is approximately 2,618 square miles, or 1,644,800 acres, in size. Approximately 18% or 287,072 acres are privately owned lands, with the remaining 82% being public lands. Of those public lands, the Plumas National Forest manages 70% (1,151,360 acres), and the Tahoe and Lassen National Forests, the Bureau of Land Management and Lassen Volcanic National Park manage the remaining 10%.

Geographically Plumas County is located at the north end of the Sierra-Nevada Range and the south end of the Cascade mountain range, where the uplifting Sierras meet the volcanically created Cascades. The County rises out of the Sacramento Valley on the west at an elevation of about 1,900 feet and goes east to meet the great basin at an elevation of over 5,000 feet with Mt. Ingall being the highest point near the center of the County at 8,372 feet. There are over 30 peaks above 7,000 feet in elevation.

Wildfire Protection

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection has statutory responsibility for wildfire protection of private lands in California. The Butte Unit is administratively responsible for fire protection of private lands in Plumas County, except within the Lake Almanor Basin, which is the responsibility of the Lassen-Modoc Unit. Wildfire Protection for vegetation fire on private lands, for most of Plumas County, except in the Lake Almanor Basin, has been granted to the Plumas National Forest through a cooperative agreement. Fire protection for all other fire emergencies, structure, vehicle, etc. is the responsibility of the local fire agency. The Local Responsibility Area (LRA) in Plumas County includes the City of Portola, portions of Quincy and East Quincy and the portion of Sierra Valley south of the railroad.

The Plumas NF provides wildfire protection including most of the prevention law enforcement activities with 17-5 person engine companies, one medium helicopter with a 14 person helitack/rappel crew, one Type I hotshot crew, 2-20 person IA hand crews, 3 IA dozers, 2 IA

water tenders, 11 fire prevention technicians, 6 lookouts, and 14 chief officers.

Fire protection for other than vegetation fires is provided to some of the communities by nineteen fire departments located throughout the county. Some of these departments have a paid Chief and some staff, but more commonly these departments are comprised entirely of volunteers.

Vegetation in the County is varied and diverse. There are 10 of the 13 NFFL fuel models represented within the County. There are dense forest on the Westside with Douglas fir and oak hardwoods, to heavy mixed conifer with both pine and fir species dominating, to pure fir and sub alpine fir stands, to lodgepole stands surrounding high mountain lakes and meadows some with stringers of aspens, to eastside ponderosa pine stands, all interspersed with brush fields and plantations from prior large fires and forest management activities, and into the rangelands and great basin sage brush on the eastside.

IA Success

The Plumas National Forest provides wildfire protection responsibility for much of Plumas County and averages about 170 ignitions per year, with 60% caused by lightning and 40% from humans. Of the human caused fires, smoking and escaped campfires constitute 8%, escaped debris burns 5%, equipment 4%, children 3%, Arson 3%, railroad activities 1% and on 16%, the cause was unable to be accurately determined. The Plumas NF has averaged about 23,000 acres per year burned over the last 5 years. The majority of fires, 97%, are caught on initial attack and suppressed at less than 10 acres. The 3% that escape initial attack are responsible for 99% of the acres burned. The majority of fires, 87%, occur from May through September. Amongst the National Forest in California, the Plumas NF usually ranks from between third to fifth for number of fires and acres burned.

In 2003, Fire occurrence on the Plumas NF was up 35% over the 5 year average. While lightning fire occurrence was up 78% with 134 ignitions, person caused fires were down 20% with only 49 ignitions. Initial attack was extremely successful in 2003, with only 109 acres burned, for 5% of the five year average.

Assets Protected

Plumas County has a population of approximately 21,000 in with a dramatic rise, often doubling or tripling that number, during the months of July, August and September. In addition to increasing seasonal populations of second home residents, other outdoors recreation opportunities on the lakes, rivers, creeks, roads, trails, resorts and golf courses bring in a high volume of visitors to the entire County. Plumas County's housing development is on a continual rise in the eastern and northern parts of the County (Graeagle, Portola, Sierra Valley and Chester, Lake Almanor).

Assets protected include over 50 residential communities and subdivisions; private timberlands; public timberlands; 7 large recreational lakes and numerous small lakes; dozens of rivers and streams all feeding two major drainages and three forks of the Feather River and into Lake Oroville; hundreds of recreational sites developed and undeveloped; the Feather

River hydro electric project of Pacific Gas & Electric, domestic water supply and storage sources for local and statewide residents, game and non-game wildlife; private and public rangelands, wild and scenic river and scenic highway corridors; and critical infrastructure features of communication sites, highways and railroads.

The level of fire protection funding provided by the Plumas NF is a function of Congress and the President's desire. Currently the Forest Service is being allocated most of which it has identified in need according to the National Fire Management Analysis System (NFMAS). NFMAS is an economic model that considering fire occurrence history, acres burned and assets at risk; computes the most effective suppression program considering Cost (pre-suppression and suppression) and Net Value Change (damage or loss of resources following a fire) (C+NVC). C+NVC is the basis of the model that the Forest Service uses to show Congress how much money is needed to meet the Most Efficient Level (MEL) over a ten-year period. The Plumas NF is currently at 95% of MEL.

Fire Management Prescriptions

Suppression

The Plumas National Forest manages most of the public lands Plumas County, with the Lassen and Tahoe NF's and the Bureau of Land management managing a much smaller portion. In Plumas County on public lands managed by the USFS and BLM, the suppression prescription is "Control". There are no areas of modified suppression of "Confine" or "Contain" or "let Burn". All fires receive rapid aggressive initial attack within the limits of and capabilities of resources. About 3-4 days per year the Plumas NF has more that 10 ignitions at the same time (from lightning), with 30 –50 per day not uncommon. In those cases, available resources are allocated according to risks of public safety, residential developments, growth potential and suppression difficulty. The primary objective is public and firefighter safety first.

Vegetation Management – Public Lands

The Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act (HFQLGFRA) and the more recent Sierra Nevada Forests Plan Amendment (Sierra-Nevada Framework) govern vegetation management on public lands, managed by the three National Forests. The HFQLGFRA plan is for the construction of a network of Defensible Fuel Profile Zones (DFPZ's) and creates buffers around communities with Community Defense Zones (CDZ's). The HFQLGFRA law was passed in 1998, directing the three Forest's to plan and implement this network of fuelbreaks within five years that would create fire resistant breaks to reduce the size of catastrophic wildfires. These DFPZ's are planned along the network of highways and road systems that transverses the three National Forests and around designated communities, for about ¼ mile in width. The silvicultural prescription is for thinning from below and some canopy removal with focus on treating surface and ladder fuels. The HFQLGFRA goal is for the treatment of 40,000- 60,000 acres per year, with about 60% being within Plumas County. However for a variety of reasons, only 16% of the total project acres have been treated.

A limited number of other vegetation management activities are occurring in the form of prescribed burning, but most are in support of the HFQLGFRA.

Vegetation Management – Private Lands

Vegetation treatment on Private lands is the responsibility of the landowners for the most part. Large industrial landholders such as Sierra Pacific Industries, Collins Pine, Chy and Graeagle Land & Water, are treating their lands through a variety of silvicultural prescriptions. They have created fuelbreaks along major travel corridors, performed commercial thinning, sanitation removal, shelterwood removal and also created regeneration units. Follow-up activities of hazard reduction and plantings have occurred. All activities have been in compliance with the California State Forest Practices Act.

Additionally, a number of landowners are in various stages of sub-division development. Subdivisions in Plumas County must be approved through the County Planning Department and must conform to CDF Fire Safe Standards, PRC 4291. The fastest development is occurring in the eastern and northern parts of the County (Graeagle, Portola, Sierra Valley and Chester, Lake Almanor). Many of the home sites and homes are being purchased and developed are for second or third homes, adding to the seasonal population changes and growing recreational development.

The Plumas County Fire Safe Council (PC FSC) has also become more active in the last couple years and is growing under funding, for treating hazardous fuels with USFS and BLM grant monies provided by increased federal funding under the National Fire Plan; and with Title II and Title III funds from PL 106-393, "Secure Rural School and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000" funds. In 2002, the Council has applied for grant funding to accomplish Hazardous Fuel Reduction (HFR) in a number of areas. The Council is working in 2003 on a grant from the Plumas NF to create demonstration hazardous fuel reduction projects on 100 acres of private lands across the County, and have contracted for the services of a Registered Professional Forester to lead that effort. Additionally, PC FSC obtained funding in 2002 to treat 50 acres of public lands adjacent to a community. Planning efforts are currently underway. The PC FSC also has 11 new HFR projects in development for 2003 to reduce hazardous fuels on 800 acres of public and private land.

Pre-Fire Planning

Under the operating plan of the Four Party Agreement, the Plumas National Forest conducts most of the prevention law enforcement activities that would normally be conducted by CDF. However, a State law exist which prohibits Federal officers in northern California, from going on to private lands to enforce State laws except by invitation or threat of wildfire. An exemption exists but requires the County Sheriff to enact it. To date this has not happened. Current activities on private land include the issuance of burning permits, residential inspections for those whom request it and wildland fire investigation.

Plumas County has Weed and Hazard Abatement Ordinance, but lacks the resources to perform inspections. They will respond to complaints, but there is currently no process for assessing civil penalties without filing a complaint with the District Attorney's office. At this time there are no scheduled or annual residential fire hazard inspections. Most of the residents are left to police themselves or their neighbors. Concerned residents can file a complaint with the County or CDF and request an inspection.

The Four Party Agreement however does not include fire safe planning on State Responsibility Area (SRA) lands. The Fire Protection Planning Bureau handles this responsibility through its Fire Protection Planning, pre-development review of plans for fire safe requirements (PRC-4290). The Plumas County Fire Safe Council furthers the fire safe efforts through fire wise community and evacuation planning, and hazardous fuel reduction.

There are two active Fire Safe Councils in Plumas County; the Plumas County, and the Lake Almanor Basin Fire Safe Councils. The Plumas Fire Safe Council began in 1997 and at that time representatives from the Lake Almanor region participated. In 2000 the Lake Almanor FSC was formed because of the desire to be more localized and because the region is in the jurisdiction of the Lassen-Modoc CDF Unit. The Plumas County Fire Safe Council will continue to function as the umbrella council for the County and will coordinate with and work on behalf of others when requested.

The Plumas County Fire Safe Council has retained the services of a private wildland fire management consultant, with over 30 years of experience, to develop and manage grants which include planning for hazardous fuel reduction, implementing 13 community homeowner educational projects, Council coordination, and other public education activities.

Other Fiscal - CDF Support to Plumas County

As 78% of Plumas County is timberland, the timber industry has traditionally been the primary employer. One person, an area forester, located in Quincy, staffs the Plumas County area of the CDF Butte Unit. The primary function of this position is to regulate timber-harvesting activities on private lands within Plumas County, with the exception of the Lake Almanor Basin and Indian Valley areas.

As a collateral duty the Area Forester has assumed some of the fire protection planning and prevention duties in order to maintain CDF interaction with the county and the public. The Area Forester responds to requests for information from County Planning regarding subdivision maps, parcel maps, General Plan amendments, timberland conversions, and planned development permits. In addition, the Area Forester responds to requests from the public, County Building Department, and developers for site inspections regarding Fire Safe Regulation compliant driveways, subdivisions, setback variances, and harvesting and landscaping methods to reduce fuel loads.

Butte Unit Objectives - 2004

1. Participate in the meetings and activities of the Plumas County Fire Safe Council.
2. Assist the Plumas County Fire Safe Council with the development and implementation of a Plumas County Wildland Fire Plan.
3. Assist the Plumas Fire Safe Council with their effort to update the "Communities at Risk" listing to include those Plumas County communities not currently listed.
4. Participate in the Plumas County Fire Safe Councils fuel reduction efforts.
5. Actively participate in State Park fuel reduction control burns.
6. Support community pre-attack planning and community wildfire hazard planning in the WUI

areas of Plumas County.

7. With regard to current budgetary constraints, ultimately add staff dedicated to addressing fire planning and enforcement issues in Plumas County.

Butte Unit Prescriptions - 2004

1. Maintain CDF presence in Plumas County at current levels using the Unit Pre Fire Captain as the council liaison, area forester and VMP battalion chief, with the long-term plan to fund a fire planning / enforcement position for Plumas County.

Plumas County Fire Safe Council

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(530) 283-0829 (800) 973-3320

www.plumasfiresafe.org



For further information on the activities and projects through the Plumas County Fire Safe Council see the Plumas County Wildland Fire Mitigation Plan.

2004 Annual Goals

1. To develop and implement a Countywide Community Wildland Fire Plan with community based planning.
2. Increase public knowledge and awareness of the wildland fire hazard and efforts they can make to reduce their threat.
3. Develop more community-based involvement.
4. Implement community hazardous fuel reduction projects.
5. Develop guidelines for selection criteria for hazardous fuel treatment projects.
6. Continue to pursue grant funds.

Major Past Accomplishments

- ✓ 2001 - Plumas FSC awarded its first national fire plan grants, \$100K for Firewise Consultation & Education through the USFS and \$62K for FSC coordination from BLM.
- ✓ 2002 - Jerry Hurley hired to coordinate FSC activities and the FSC became incorporated and received its 501C3 status from the Franchise Tax Board. Plumas FSC website developed www.plumasfiresafe.org. Evacuation plans completed for 7 communities. FSC created an educational display board for community events.
- ✓ 2003 – MOU completed with Plumas Corporation to be the FSC fiscal manager. Homeowner consultations expanded to 13 communities. Hazardous fuel reduction work has begun on 250 acres, on four projects, in 6 communities across the county. A one day Firewise workshop was presented in eastern Plumas County.

2004 Accomplishments to date

- ✓ A one day Firewise workshop in Almanor was presented by PC FSC in March
- ✓ The elderly and disabled defensible space program received funding and began work.
- ✓ Planning has begun for fuel treatment on 587 acres. Grant request have been submitted to treat an additional 637 acres.
- ✓ Council members are working aggressively with California Department of Forestry & the

Board of Forestry to streamline timber harvesting operations for hazardous fuel reduction projects next to communities. Emergency exemptions were approved by the Board of Forestry at their June meeting.

2004 Projects

The Plumas County Fire Safe Council has several fire safe planning and fuel reduction projects underway in 2004. For further information, see the grant table in section 3 of this document.

1. **Countywide Community Wildland Fire Plan** - The highest priority project for the Plumas County Fire Safe Council is the development and implementation of a Countywide Community Wildland Fire Plan with community based planning. This project began in the fall of 2003 with the Fire Safe Council developing a GIS layer identifying the counties WUI (wildland urban interface) areas.
2. **Communities at Risk** – work through the California Fire Alliance process to add the remaining Plumas County communities not currently listed on the national registry as “communities at risk” from wildfire.
3. **Plumas County Hazardous Fuels Assessment Strategy** – Wildland Rx hired to complete an assessment of fuels countywide, and develop fire behavior predictions along with general fuels treatment recommendations. The FSC will then develop a prioritization of areas and projects based upon the contractor's findings.
4. **Hazardous Fuels Reduction** – fuel reduction work scheduled to begin on several projects throughout Plumas County in the fall of 2004 following the fire season.

Almanor Basin FSC

The Almanor Basin Fire Safe Council is active and a dedicated community member has worked passionately to develop educational information for the Basin. They are under the administrative jurisdiction of the Lassen Modoc Unit. This Council is also working aggressively with the Lassen-Modoc Unit, Plumas County, and the Lassen and Plumas NF's to seek grants for chipping and reducing hazardous fuels in and around communities, seeking an alternate route for a at risk community at the end of a one-way road, community fuel reduction, and the completion of a fuelbreak around the entire Lake Almanor Basin.

Butte Unit
Fire Management Plan
2005

PLUMAS FIRE SAFE COUNCIL MEMBERS

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Andy Anderson	Quincy Fire Protection District	Sue McCourt	Plumas National Forest
Art Buss	Graeagle FD	Carl McDonald	Greenhorn VFD
Henri Brachais	CDF – Butte Unit	Rob Mac Whorter	USFS, Plumas National Forest
Carl Butz	Sierra County Fire Safe Council	Dennis Miller	Plumas Planning Department
Jaye Chasseure	Citizen	Jack Millet	Consulting Forester
Dick Castaldini	Quincy Community Services District	Dennis Neves	USFS, Plumas National Forest
Dick Chapman	Camp Layman Association	Ray Nichol	Quincy FD/FS Grant Liaison
LouAnn Charbonnier	USFS, Plumas National Forest	Phil Noia	Citizen
Curt Clarkson	Graeagle Property Owner	Vincent Obersinner	USDA – NRCS Greenville
Richard Cox	C Road/Beckworth VFD	George Ozanich	Air Quality
Ron Cross	C Road Citizen	Jim Pena	USFS, Plumas National Forest
Michael DeLasaux, Chair	University of California Cooperative Ext.	Gary Pini	Penninsula Fire Protection District
Angie Dillingham	USFS, Plumas National Forest	Mark Reno	West Almanor FD
Bob Farnworth	Feather River RCD	Dave Reynolds	USFS, Plumas National Forest
John Gay	USFS, Plumas National Forest	Bob Rodgers	Meadow Valley FD
Jim Graham	Plumas County Planning	Claude Sanders	Citizen
Warren Grandall	MVFD/FS Grant Liaison	Jack Scheer	Citizen
Jim Hamblin	Indian Falls Fire Dept.	John Sheehan	Plumas Corporation
David Hawks	CDF – Butte Unit	George Sipel	Gold Mtn. Homeowners Association
Ron Heinbockel	Plumas National Forest	Larry Sternberg	Long Valley Fire
Mary Huggins	CDF - Butte Unit	Jan Stine	Consulting Forester
Jerry Hurley, Coordinator	Coordinator Plumas FSC	Frank Stewart	Quincy Library Group Forester
Karen Jeska	Mt. Hough RD Plumas NF	Chuck Thayer	Sierra Valley Fire Dept.
Mike Kerby	Meadow Valley FD/High Sierra Fire	Jerry Vice	High Sierra Fire Company
Dick Keilhorn	Quincy Community	Brian Wayland	Consulting Forester
Dale Knutsen	Almanor Basin FSC	Larry Weaver	Citizen
Jim Krantz	Beckworth Fire Dist.	John & Mary Weddle	Citizen
Bruce Livingston	Crescent Mills FD/Indian Falls	Brian West	Sierra Pacific Industries
Jim Marty	Consulting Forester	Steve Windward	Consulting Forester
		Cindy Woods	Woods Fire & Emergency Services

